

Testimony in Support of LD 2174

An Act to Increase Predictability in the Permitting of Renewable Energy Development

Dale Knapp, PhD, Head of Development, NE

Walden Renewables

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Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Dale Knapp. I am the Head of Development at Walden Renewables and am testifying today in support of the Sponsor's Amendment to LD 2174, distributed to Interested Parties on February 18, 2026.

Walden Renewables develops, constructs, owns, and operates renewable energy projects. In Maine, we are working on projects in many communities across the state, ranging in size from 5 to 150 MW and have operational projects totaling roughly 70 MWs in Wells, Leeds, and Sanford. I have been directly involved with the entire portfolio since Walden began developing projects in the State of Maine in 2019. The company currently employs three full time employees in Maine, included Walden's co-founder. We also employ countless other Maine based construction, engineering, environmental consulting, and operations and maintenance subcontractors. Our projects include solar, wind and batteries. Walden appreciates the state's ambitious renewable energy and decarbonization goals and have generally had a good experience developing projects in Maine and we hope to continue our strong track records of success of making investments in Maine and building renewable energy projects for years to come.

LD 2174 primarily does three things 1) directs the DEP to establish a permit by rule under the Site Location of Development Act for certain types of renewable energy projects; 2) puts in place timelines for the DEP to process applications under a number of its permits; and 3) establishes that municipalities may not enact or enforce stricter requirements than those required by DEP.

Walden's interactions with DEP have overall been positive. The standards are clear and there is a very public and inclusive process for changes to regulatory expectations and approval standards. Walden appreciates the increased predictability that a permit by rule for solar projects under the site location law and guaranteed timelines for the processing of applications would bring and strongly supports these provisions. Like any business or development, renewable energy benefits from a predictable regulatory environment. A streamlined permitting processes and predictable review timelines will help lower development risks and costs for renewable projects which in turn will decrease the ultimate price the power is sold for, benefiting ratepayers.

However, the DEP permitting process is not where solar developers experience the biggest financial and development risks. With clear DEP standards, we can generally proactively work to site and design projects and work through the regulatory process with DEP to get to an approval. Where projects get derailed, even after significant investment and open communication, is at the municipal level.

As developers, we do our homework before investing in a project, but the local regulatory landscape can change quickly, which makes developing projects that take several years very difficult. In 2020, Walden Renewables reviewed the land use ordinance in a town in downeast Maine. The ordinance allowed for large scale solar with no size cap, and reasonable standards, including technical, safety, and decommissioning standards with additional standards for large-scale projects. Walden began developing a project in this community in 2021 and came forward with a preliminary proposal to the town for a 40 MW project in 2023. The town swiftly enacted a moratorium on solar after the proposal received pushback from a small vocal minority, despite having an existing ordinance in place that regulated solar projects. In 2024, the town drafted a new ordinance limiting the acreage of solar projects to a size too small for our project. Then in 2025, the town adopted an ordinance that prohibited standalone solar development all together, regardless of scale, allowing only accessory uses. The votes at the town meeting to enact the ban on solar were driven by the small vocal opposition to the project, which can be impactful in municipal votes that typically have low voter turnout.¹

Walden ultimately decided to terminate this project due to this local prohibition on solar, after investing hundreds of thousands of dollars into the project. It is also important to note that this project was awarded an offtake contract by the Maine PUC in the Tranche 2 procurement and would have delivered benefits to ratepayers across much of the state by supplying affordable clean energy. The project also would have delivered local benefits to the town and broader region from the community benefits package, which totaled over \$4.8 million including tax payments and funding of a workforce development program at Kennebec Valley Community College. None of these benefits from the project were realized by ratepayers and the communities due to a small but vocal opposition to the project who drove the change in the ordinance.

Walden has also had good experiences in many communities across Maine, such as Sanford, where there a clear and predictable solar ordinance has been in place for years. Walden has successfully permitted two projects in Sanford which are now operating and generating significant tax revenue for the town. We also try to be proactive and work with towns as they develop ordinances. We have found that sometimes towns don't understand the implications of the standards they are putting in place. For example, in early drafts of an ordinance in a western Maine town it limited solar arrays to 30 MW. We explained that considering economic and grid constraints, that would essentially result in little to no commercial solar development in the town. The town took this under advisement and developed a robust solar ordinance with different standards for small, medium and large projects, but did not preemptively limit the size of projects.

The bottom line is that as a business who wants to bring clean, renewable generation to Maine, it's nearly impossible for us to predict how a proposed project will be received in a town, even if that town already has a detailed and robust solar ordinance, and even if the developer has spent over a year working with the town to properly site the development. As soon as an actual project shows up, a

¹ <https://barharborstory.com/2025/05/21/trenton-voters-say-no-to-commercial-solar-farms/>

handful of residents take it upon themselves to save the town from industrial degradation, becoming “subject matter experts” overnight, and fighting against accepted science and the direction that the majority of Mainers overwhelmingly support. That lack of predictability brings financial risk that is difficult for businesses to absorb – slowing, if not preventing outright, Maine’s progress towards its own renewable energy and greenhouse gas emission goals and adding risk premiums to the price of power that Maine ratepayers are absorbing. I encourage the ENR committee to consider LD 2174 or other measures to help bring a more predictable regulatory environment for renewable energy projects in Maine. We continue to see the can kicked down the road, doing nothing today and waiting for a panacea to come along and fix it all. The reality is we need to act now, and do something today to bring low cost reliable, renewable energy projects online today.

In closing, DEP has reasonable standards designed to protect Maine’s natural resources, and the surrounding environment, including requiring buffer strips, limiting noise, and protecting scenic character. Those standards can also protect local municipalities.

Thank you for your time, and we urge you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 2174.

I’m happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dale Knapp', enclosed within a large, hand-drawn oval shape.

Dr. Dale F. Knapp, CSS, LSE, CEP, CPESC, PWS
Walden Renewables
424 Fore Street, Suite 2-A
Portland, ME 04102
dale.knapp@waldenrenewables.com
207-631-9134